

The First Church FAMILY

*The First Church in Albany · Founded in 1642
Reformed Church in America*

December 2017

WORSHIP:

- 3 **First Sunday of Advent** (Communion)
10:15 AM Pre-Service Music
10:30 AM Sanctuary Service Rev. Susan Vincent-Cox preaching
 Children & Worship (During Worship)
Post Service: “Be Still and Know” Advent Study and Discussion Group
Noon Cottage Meeting
- 10 **Second Sunday of Advent**
10:15 AM Pre-Service Music
10:30 AM Sanctuary Service Rev. Lynn Carman Bodden preaching
 Children & Worship (During Worship)
Post Service: “Be Still and Know” Advent Study and Discussion Group
- 17 **Third Sunday of Advent**
10:15 AM Pre-Service Music
10:30 AM Sanctuary Service Rev. Lynn Carman Bodden preaching
 Children & Worship (During Worship)
Post Service: “Be Still and Know” Advent Study and Discussion Group
- 24 **Christmas Eve**
10:15 AM Pre-Service Music
10:30 AM Sanctuary Service Rev. Lynn Carman Bodden preaching
7:00 pm Pre-Service Music (Harp)
7:30 pm Candlelight Service of Lessons and Carols
 with Choir and Instruments
- 31 **First Sunday after Christmas** (New Year’s Eve)
10:30 AM Sanctuary Service

Our Sunday morning service may be found anytime at www.firstchurchinalbany.org.

FAMILY is published eleven times a year by First Church in Albany, 110 North Pearl Street, Albany, NY 1220

From the Pastor

Dear Members and Friends,

In a very few days, we enter the season of Advent: a season of waiting, of expectation, of promise.

We **prepare** for the One who is coming into our lives, into our church, into our world. Preparing is fun: planning, decorating, cleaning, baking, making lists – checking them twice!

And we **wait**. Waiting is hard. Like small children awaiting a special time, we want the time to be now: to sing those Christmas carols, dive into those special foods, peak under the tree and the wrapping paper, hold that tiny baby Jesus and all the promise his life holds.

But gestation **takes time**. It's an intricate process to grow new life. We have to be patient.

So it is in a time of pastoral transition in the life of a church. A leader departs. That's CHANGE. It's an event, it's situational, an ending of one phase without knowing what will unfold. Then we find ourselves in a time of TRANSITION. It's a gestational time when we learn new things about ourselves, surfacing emotions about what was – or never was – and what is yet to be. It can be a chaotic time, and it can be fruitful. Once we come through this time, TRANSFORMATION will be upon us with the arrival of a new pastor – a new unfolding in God's time and in God's hands.

With guidance from your leadership, I've assembled a Transition Team to help me and to help the congregation into and through this time of transition, Joeanna Brown, Ella Campbell, Monica Marsh and Jay Reohr will act as a think tank as I propose ways to help you embrace this opportunity to discover who you are now as First Church, who the neighbors are you are called to serve, and what God is calling you to be and do from this corner in Albany in the 21st century.

We begin the process with Cottage Meetings, which will offer you the chance to talk with me about to talk about your experience of the First Church, and to share your questions and hopes for the future. We've held the first one already, and there are four more opportunities coming up. Because of the holidays, the team recommended that we offer two in December and three more in January. (See article on page 3) Please sign up! Your input is important and will help move us closer to the search process. I think you'll have fun, too!

May these be holy days, as we await the coming of God into our world, and the opening of God's new day in the life of the First Church.

Lynn

At Home with the WORD

Daily Bible Readings from the Common Lectionary www.rca.org/athome
December 1st – December 31st

1. Mark 13:24-31
2. Mark 13:32-37
3. First Sunday of Advent
4. Isaiah 40:1-11
5. Psalm 85:1-2
6. Psalm 85:8-13
7. 2 Peter 3:8-13
8. 2 Peter 3:14-15
9. Mark 1:1-8
10. Second Sunday of Advent
11. Isaiah 61:1-4
12. Isaiah 61:8-11
13. Psalm 126
14. Luke 1:46-55
15. 1 Thessalonians 5:16-24
16. John 1:6-8, 19-28
17. Third Sunday of Advent
18. 2 Samuel 7:1-11, 16
19. Psalm 89:1-4
20. Psalm 89:19-26
21. Romans 16:25-27
22. Luke 1:26-35
23. Luke 1:36-38
24. Christmas Eve; Isaiah 9:2-7
25. Christmas Day; Luke 2:1-20
26. Isaiah 61
27. Isaiah 62:1-3
28. Psalm 148
29. Galatians 4:4-7
30. Luke 2:22-40
31. First Sunday after Christmas

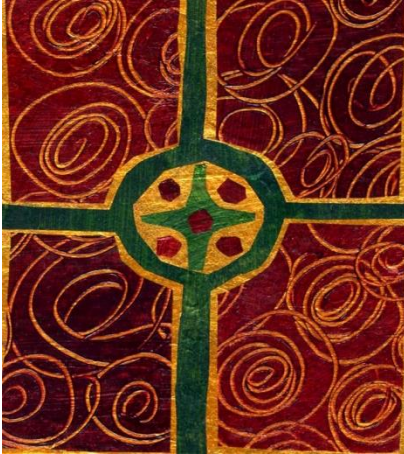
Sign Up for Cottage Meetings with Pastor Lynn

At the beginning of every interim period, I have held a series of "Cottage Meetings." These are gatherings in homes and at church where members like YOU are invited to talk about your experience of your church, and to share your questions and hopes for the future. Each gathering has the same format: light refreshments followed by conversation around the five easy questions. The responses to these questions help me to get to know you, and you to get to know each other better. They also till the ground for the creation of First Church's profile for the pastoral search. Each meeting lasts no more than two hours. Space is limited to encourage good conversation in a small group. Your input is extremely valuable. Please sign up!

- November 20 at 6:3pm – Shirley Bone's in Delmar
- December 3 at Noon – Church Parlor
- December 8 at 6pm – Church Parlor – Youth and Young Adults
- January 6 at 2pm – Mondore's in Loudonville
- January 8 at 2pm – Van Epps' in Rensselaer
- January 14 at Noon – Church Parlor

“Be Still and Know” Small Group for Advent

Rev. Sue Cox will be leading “Be Still and Know” Advent Small Group. There is a choice of two meeting times for each of the three sessions: Sundays beginning Dec. 3 right after worship, or Advent Mondays beginning Dec 4 at 6:30pm. We will meet in the Powell Room or Parlor. For more information please contact Rev. Sue Cox.



Be Still and Know Advent Small Group

Music/meditation

*Lectio Divina (Divine Reading) of Advent
scripture & discussion*

Short contemplative practices

If you cannot make all 3, come to those you can.
Powell Room or Parlor

*Behold God’s Love in scripture and in the silence
between the Word* Carpet Page © Jan Richardson. janrichardson.com

Pre-Service Music Advent Sundays

Beginning at 10:15 am December 3rd

Each Sunday during Advent we have special music at 10:15 am in the sanctuary. Come to Worship early to relax, refresh yourself, and prepare again for the coming of Christ.

- December 3** Schubler Chorales of Johann Sebastian Bach
December 10 David Bon-Keen, bassoon
December 17 Christmas with the First Church trio - David BonKeen Bassoon;
Doug Persons, trumpet; Peter Subers, French horn
December 24 Christmas Carol Sing-along

Christmas Eve Candlelight Worship



- 7:00 pm** Pre-service prelude of harp music
7:30 pm Candlelight Service of Lessons and
Carols with Choir and Instruments
8:45 pm Wassail Hour

Hanging of the Greens

Come join us for the hanging of the Greens.



There will be two events:

- **Saturday, December 9** at 10:00 am. We will do the outside decorating and the sanctuary and lobby trees.
- **Friday, December 15** at 5:30 pm After pizza, we will do the wreathes, laurel and other miscellaneous decorating and have a short worship. This is geared for families. Contact Ian Leet or sign up in the lobby.

Blue Christmas

Wednesday, December 20th at 7:30 pm

The season of Advent and Christmas is an emotionally charged time. There is a great deal of pressure placed on people not only to spend a lot of money, but also to feel a certain way and to experience a particularly joyful mood. All of this is coupled with an emphasis on remembering, togetherness and family. For those who are hurting – for any number of reasons - the atmosphere of this time of year can amplify feelings of pain, grief, loneliness or despair. When a person who is not feeling very merry is surrounded by others who are, it can even be hard to attend worship at holiday times.

Enter a “Blue Christmas” service! The purpose of this service is to provide a setting where people can come together, acknowledge their pain, be reassured they are not alone in their feelings – and that there is nothing wrong with feelings they may be having – and experience the message of God’s unconditional love which is at the heart of the season.

On Wednesday evening, December 20, at 7:30pm, you are invited to a Blue Christmas service at the First Church in Albany. Please join us, if this service may fit your needs this Christmas. And please pass the word on to your friends and neighbors for whom this service might be comforting.

Readers Needed Christmas Eve Service

If you would like to be a reader at the Christmas Eve Service, please talk to Rev. Lynn Carman Bodden. Thank you!

Christmas Offering

The Board of Deacons has designated the 2018 Christmas offering for two ministries:

- **Habitat for Humanity**

Habitat for Humanity partners with people to help them build a place they can call home. Homebuyers work alongside volunteers to help build their own houses, which they then purchase with an affordable mortgage. This improves our neighborhoods by not only giving families a place to call home, but also improves our neighborhoods by improving homes that are already there.

- **St. Thomas Reformed Church**

The St. Thomas reformed Church was established around 1660 and is one of the oldest congregations in the Virgin Islands. They have played a large roll with helping out those in need after the hurricanes that hit this area. There are days when they give food and supplies to well over 300 families. The current pastor, Rev. Jeffrey Neevel, is the son Rev. Jim Neevel, our previous interim minister.

Church Library

Please come and explore our newly renovated First Church Library and check out a good book. Interesting categories from our 400 book inventory include Aging, books by First Church Authors, a large collection of Guidepost Books, and a good Bible Research/ Study Section. There is also an extensive Inspirational and Daily Reading Section.

Children will receive a big balloon if they check out a book from our extensive children and young adult section and read it. Open every Sunday and during church office hours. Reading is healthy! Five ways to help raise your grades in school are READ, READ, READ, READ, and READ.

The Library Committee

Weathervanes –

Holiday Dinner & Christmas Party at Lunchtime



Join the Weathervanes on Wednesday, December 6th, at 12:30 p.m. for our Holiday Dinner Party at lunchtime in Zimmerman Hall for a Chicken Marsala Holiday Dinner with singing and stories. The cost is \$15.00 per person. A contribution of \$5.00 or more toward the purchase of books as Christmas gifts for the children of our Food Pantry clients, would be appreciated. Please make your reservations with Audrey Ming (518-456-5485) by November 26th.

Church Safety

When word of the terrible tragedy at the First Baptist Church of Sutherland Springs, TX began to flow out in a great torrent, we were frightened and angered and appalled and overwhelmed. This most recent episode of a shooting in a church led some among us to question our levels of security here at First Church. In the past several years, church shootings have been randomly located, motivated by broken relationships, old grudges, deep prejudices and mental health issues. More often than not, people experiencing broken relationships, nursing grudges, bound by prejudice and struggling with mental health are NOT violent - not any more than those who do not experience these things. Still, as followers of Christ, it is our calling to know each other, and to be aware of ways we can help those who suffer find healing and peace, as ministers, by referral and through prayer, as well as through practical efforts to keep us all safe as a church community.

Recognizing that we cannot prevent all acts of violence, the Joint Boards discussed the issue of church safety at its meeting on November 15. We want you to know that on Sunday mornings:

- After 10:30am, the doors at the Chapel, Orange, and Sheridan street entrances are locked. Only the Pearl Street entrance remains open throughout the service.
- The Deacons stand as greeters at the Pearl Street doors, and at least two will remain there throughout the entire worship service.
- We have a phone available in the narthex for emergencies, although we know that with cellphones, any of us can call for emergency assistance should we need it, and that first responders will arrive quickly.

There are other actions we have taken and will take to create a safe, loving and faithful space here. We follow a church safety policy to protect our children, youth and the adults who work with them. We have an AED on site, and will schedule a training for Joint Boards and staff so we use it properly. We will assemble a list of individuals who can respond in case of a health emergency during worship. We will probably schedule and end-of-service fire drill, and will keep you informed.

Conversations about church safety are complicated and multi-layered. I am glad we are talking openly about this together. My prayer for us all echoes that of a colleague who ended a similar note to her congregation with these words:

I pray that in these days we keep our focus where it should be...the flourishing of life, God's kingdom come...gun crime as a public health issue, the prevention of domestic violence...loving one's neighbor as God loves us.

Lynn

No December Meeting for First Church Readers Group



There is no December meeting but we will meet in January when we will be discussing *Underground Railroad*, Colson Whitehead's Pulitzer Prize winning novel interweaves fantasy and history, past and present, in a jarring, graphic retelling of the brutal history of slavery through the story of the slave, Cora escaping on a real Underground Railroad.

February we will discussing *Lily and the Octopus* by Steven Rowley .

Christmas Shoppe

Each year through the ministry of the First Church Food Pantry we help parents provide Christmas gifts for their children. The Christmas Shoppe will be held on the week of December 18th. Toys for Tots has not yet assigned a date for their toy delivery. The Christmas Shoppe will be held from 9:00 to 11:30 a.m. in Zimmerman Hall. Volunteers are welcome to help set up. Donations of new and gently-used toys, puzzles, games, books and children's clothing will be received until Monday, December 13th. For more information, or to volunteer, contact Lorraine Houk at the church (463-4449). As of the newsletter printing, we already have 62 children signed up to receive toys.

Mitten Box for Christmas Shoppe

The Giving Box: Located in the Lounge
Mittens, gloves, hats and scarves (children & adult sizes)
These will be given to the children for the Christmas Shoppe.

Food Pantry Collections

Beginning in December on the second Sunday of the month, we will be collection toiletries for the Food Pantry. These are items which cannot be purchased with food stamps, yet as necessary for individuals and families on tight budgets as for any of us. Beginning December 10, and on subsequent second Sundays, you are invited to bring items up to the communion table before worship begins. We will dedicate them during our time of prayer. Thank you for reaching out to help your neighbors in need.

- December 10 – Disposable diapers (assorted sizes)
- January 14 – Toilet paper
- February 11 – Soap
- March 11 – Razors
- April 8 – Shampoo
- May 13 – Sanitary pads

Our next Homeless Shelter Dinner is December 15th

The theme is "Italian Night" and there's a sign-up sheet is on the hospitality table. Bring your dishes (in disposable containers) to the church on Sunday or any day between 9 and 1. If your dish contains pork or pork products please note that on the container. Questions? Call or email Mary Bon (463-4449) or maryebon@verizon.net. – and THANK-YOU!

Overflow Shelter Dinner Deliverers Needed. Our overflow Shelter Dinner Schedule is set. Can you deliver a meal to the shelter on Friday afternoon or evening? Sign up at the hospitality table or call or email Mary Bon (463-4449) or maryebon@verizon.net. – and THANK-YOU!

Growing Green

This is part of an ongoing series on how we can "grow green." Each month we'll share a few tips on simple practices that we can do to increase our stewardship of God's good earth.

- Decorate with live plants, fresh greens and real Christmas trees. Living things (even cut down) are renewable, recyclable, and soak up CO2 while they grow. Skip the tinsel - trees with tinsel are hard to recycle.
- Save on wrapping paper: use and re-use old maps, comics section of the newspaper, children's artwork, a scarf, an attractive dish towel, or a bandana to wrap gifts.
- Think of alternative gift-giving: - home-baked or home-made gifts, gifts of services like washing someone's windows or taking someone grocery shopping; a gift of a donation to a favorite charity or Fair trade items at local sales or on-line.
- Decorate with LED lights which use 90% less electricity.

"Ring in the New Year" with Bells at Worship on December 31st the Sunday after Christmas

Come join us on December 31st as we ring in the new year with the joyful sound of bells. Ringing and singing with young and old, strangers and friends is fun. Bring your own bell or use one of ours. We'll have lots of extra bells available. "Ring Them Bells!"

Reminders from the Financial Secretary

- Remember to complete your Offering Pledge for 2017 if not already fulfilled.
- All 2017 contributions must be received by Sunday, January 7th, 2018.
- These contributions must be dated 2017.
- After January 8th, 2018, all contributions will be posted to 2018 regardless of the date on your check.

If you have any questions regarding this note or for any matters concerning your donations, please contact me atwsivaslian@nycap.rr.com or 518-495-6353.

Thank you.

Wayne Sivaslian, Financial Secretary

Handel's Messiah at St. Peter's Episcopal Church

3:00 pm, December 3rd

On Sunday, December 3rd at 3:00 pm, G. F. Handel's *Messiah* will be performed at St. Peter's Episcopal Church, 107 State Street, Albany, with St. Peter's Choir (Neil Keen, conductor), soloists, chamber orchestra and Mary Bon, organist. The concert is free, but there will be a free will offering.

Rev. Cameron Monthly Brunch

Rev. Bill Cameron began gathering a group for lunch on the first Thursday of the month. The group continues to meet each month at the Gateway Diner, 899 Central Ave. in Albany. Anyone can join us on December 7th starting at 12:15 and stay until you wish to leave. We all pay for our own. Contact Donna E. Schultz at deschultz07@aol.com or 518.429.1255.

Christmas Poinsettia Memorials

Please send a note or call the church office (518.463.4449) by Monday, December 8th to place your order for Christmas Poinsettia memorials. A minimum donation of \$10 per plant is requested. Make your check payable to First Church in Albany (marked: Poinsettias). After Christmas, the plants are shared with our homebound members and friends.

FOCUS Churches of Albany Save the Date:

Sunday, February 4 will see two big events for FOCUS Churches. The first is a joint worship service of 2018 will begin at 10 am at **Delmar Reformed Church**, 386 Delaware Avenue.

From 12 to 2 pm, **Empty Bowls 2018** will be also be held in the Delmar Reformed Fellowship Hall. This is a joint fundraiser between FOCUS Churches and the Hunger Action Network of NYS (HANNYS). Please note new location and time – and watch for more info!

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The deadline for the January issue of *FAMILY* is December 15.

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Dear Friends at First Church,

Thank you so much for the wonderful farewell reception and for the many kind words and gestures of appreciation. We were especially touched that you chose to make contributions to Room for All and to Christian Peacemaker Teams, two causes dear to our hearts.

We miss First Church, think of you often and hold you in our prayers.

Sincerely,
John and Marilyn

Thank You for Donations to the Food Pantry

- Beth Davis, Melbourne Australia gave a gift to the Food Pantry for the 375th Anniversary
- Shirley Bone gave a gift for the First Church Food Pantry Thanksgiving Baskets.

Thank You!

- Thank you to Alfred S. Mueller for his monetary gift to the First Church in Albany.
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In Sympathy

Our sympathy and prayers go out to Rev. Sue Vincent-Cox and her husband, Jim Cox, and family on the passing of Jim's mother Patricia Cox on November 16, 2017.

This Christmas
mend a quarrel
Seek out a forgotten friend.
Write a love letter.
Share some treasure. Give a
soft answer. Encourage youth.
Keep a promise. Find the time.
Forgive an enemy. Listen.
Apologize if you were wrong.
Think first of someone else.
Be kind and gentle.
Laugh a little. Laugh a little more.
Express your gratitude. Gladden
the heart of a child. Take pleasure
in the beauty and wonder of the earth.
Speak your love. Speak it again.
Speak it still once again.

~ Anonymous



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RETURN SERVICE REQUIRED